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Everything old is new again

Was it *deja vu*? Monday's *Washington Post* carried a front-page headline proclaiming "CIA Aiding Iraq in Gulf War." The subhead read, "Target Data From U.S. Satellites Supplied for Nearly 2 Years." Two years? That's about as old as the story itself. Details of intelligence transfers from the United States to Iraq have been common currency in the Washington cocktail-party circuit for over a year.

The story first made print in *The Washington Times*. On Sept. 5, Cord Meyer, a former CIA officer, discussed the subject in an article in the Commentary pages. A news story subsequently published in the Dec. 8 *Times* explained the intelligence transfers in the context of Saudi Arabian diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East. Newspapers in other parts of the country weren't far behind. *The Post*, for one reason or another, chose to ignore it.

The gist of the story is that the Central Intelligence Agency has been supplying information to Iraq from U.S. reconnaissance-satellite photographs and other sources. The reason, Mr. Meyer pointed out four months ago, was that some Reagan officials felt "the

need . . . to hold down Iraqi casualties," and saw photo-recon information as one way to help Iraq's generals make better use of their superior firepower. Regardless of the implications of the administration's decision to give Iraq an assist in its incredibly bloody six-year war with Iran, this "scoop" is passe.

Yet there it was Monday in *The Post*. Page One. Major headline, with a suitably pungent deck. And written, no less, by none other than veteran reporter Bob Woodward, justifiably noted for his Pulitzer-winning reportage in the Watergate affair. Why Mr. Woodward's editors would buy a regurgitated story, attribute it to the usual "informed sources," and repackage it as headline news has knowledgeable folks around town scratching their heads. They needn't wear out their scalps.

The Reagan administration has been seriously wounded by the Iran-"contra" caper, and *The Post* smells blood in the water. Anything that keeps the sharks in a feeding frenzy, even if it's old news, is the name of the game now. It makes good political sense, if you're gunning for a president, but it is lousy journalism.